

U.S. Department of Commerce Standards Developing Organizations Roundtable (10/7/2003)

The International Trade Administration and Technology Administration hosted a Roundtable on Industry Standards for the Textile and Apparel sector on October 7, 2003 from 10:00am to 1:00pm in the USA Trade Center, Ronald Reagan Building, Training Room A. Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) for Textiles, Apparel and Consumer Goods Industries, James Leonard moderated the roundtable. Deputy Under Secretary (D/US) for Technology Administration (TA) Benjamin Wu and Assistant Secretary for Trade Development in the International Trade Administration (ITA), Linda Conlin co-hosted the roundtable.

Following DAS Leonard's summary of Secretary Evans Eight-Point Standards Initiative, D/US Wu outlined the standards-related work done by the Department's National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to reduce barriers to trade. A/S Conlin commented that the ITA has seen that standards are increasingly becoming a barrier to trade, which hurts the competitiveness of U.S. firms and lessens global economic growth. Consequently, standards have become a priority at the Department.

Following Linda Conlin's remarks, representatives from various trade associations made the following points:

The American Textile Manufacturers Institute (ATMI)
Patti Adair, Vice President, Textile Products and Standards

ATMI is the national trade association for the domestic textile industry. Member companies operate in more than 30 states and the industry employs approximately 450,000 people. ATMI's objective is to provide its member companies with an organization to deal with problems and programs on an industry-wide, national basis. The institute is engaged in a number of industry initiatives to encourage global competitiveness and increase foreign market access. ATMI is the U.S. textile industry's primary spokesman with the legislative and administrative branches of the federal government as well as the news media.

General Approach to Standards:

§ ATMI and its members actively participate in the development of standards through third-party standards developing organizations.

§ Since January 1, 1999, ATMI has been the Administrator of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) Technical Committee (TC) 38- Textiles TAG (technical advisory group). The scope of TC 38 includes 83 standards that are under direct responsibility of the secretariat relating to fibers, yarns, textile products, and other related materials.

§ ATMI holds two ISO/TC38 Secretariats: SC19 Textile Burning Behavior and SC23 Fibers and Yarns.

§ ATMI works closely with many textile standards groups, e.g., American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM), American Association of Textile Chemists and Colorists (AATCC), and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

§ ATMI also works with regulatory agencies, e.g., the Federal Trade Commission and the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Specific Issues of Concern:

§ ISO international standards should be developed on objective criteria, not biased to standards of particular regions, notably the EU.

§ There is a perception that the EU has disproportionate influence in the ISO because each EU member has a separate vote.

§ For several years the ISO has been trying to develop a care label for textile and apparel products. Most EU countries are members of the International Association for Textile Care Labeling (GINETEX) and support that care labeling system, which is trademarked and has a usage fee. The U.S. and Japan have openly argued against the use of a trademarked system. ATMI, which has been very active in the ISO care labeling issue, has reported that the "history of ISO 3758's development has been one of calculated tactics to delay and interfere with the development of a truly international care labeling standards in order to preserve a trademarked care labeling system."

§ The U.S. is currently working on rigorous textile flammability standards and we may want to propose similar standards internationally.

Desired Government Assistance:

§ Need the USG to provide early market intelligence so that organizations like ATMI can get involved in the development of foreign standards and technical regulations in order to ensure that U.S. industry concerns are taken into consideration.

American Association of Textile Chemists and Colorists (AATCC)
Jack Daniels, Executive Director

AATCC is the world's largest technical and scientific society devoted to the advancement of textile chemistry. The Association has more than 5,000 individual and 270 corporate members in the U.S. and in 65 countries. AATCC seeks to promote increased knowledge of the application of dyes and chemicals in the textile industry, encourage in any practical way research work on chemical processes and materials of importance to the textile industry, and establish for the members channels by which the interchange of professional knowledge among them may be increased.

General Approach to Standards:

§ AATCC is the primary standards development organization in the area of color or dyeing of textiles, finishing technologies and cleansing of textiles and apparel.

§ AATCC has developed more than 200 test methods and evaluation procedures. AATCC's 2003 Technical Manual lists 125 active test methods and evaluation procedures.

§ AATCC methods are often developed by volunteers from all textile industry segments.

§ AATCC sells its technical manuals, test methods and related quality control materials to more than 60 countries. Retailers frequently specify AATCC test methods worldwide with around 50% of AATCC quality control materials being sold in the United States and approximately 30% being sold in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

§ AATCC works with the ISO and other countries on standards and its methods are often

adopted internationally by the ISO.

§ AATCC is a member of the U.S. TAG for ISO TC38-Textiles and is the delegated Co-Secretariat of TC38/SC 1 Tests for Coloured Textiles and Colorants and the Secretariat of TC38/SC 2 Cleansing, Finishing and Water Resistance Tests.

§ AATCC is actively involved with ASTM, ANSI, NFPA, and other standards organizations.

Specific Issues of Concern:

§ With textile plant closings and supplier consolidations, there are fewer volunteers available to develop standards for the industry.

§ Ensure that ISO methods take into account U.S. and AATCC practices.

§ Recognition that some consumer practices differ around the world, i.e. laundering conditions.

§ The possibility of block voting by the EU in the ISO.

§ There is limited participation of western hemisphere countries in ISO/TC38 activities

§ There are increasing costs for standards activities and ISO mandated time constraints to progress standards.

§ In the EU and Asia, most standards and test methods utilized in textiles are not voluntary, as in the United States. Extra testing is expensive for U.S. exporters, whereas foreign suppliers do not face similar standards and testing in the United States.

Desired Government Assistance:

§ AATCC recommended USG assistance in covering costs for translating AATCC methods into other languages. This would allow them to promote the use of U.S. standards around the world and especially in Latin America.

§ The USG should encourage U.S. industry to stay involved in the standards process so that we can better ensure that foreign standards do not create unnecessary trade barriers to U.S. exports.

National Textile Association (NTA)

Richard Malachowski, Technical Manager, Webster Division, Cranston Print Works

NTA was formed in 2002 from the merger of the Northern Textile Association (founded in 1854) and the Knitted Textile Association (founded in 1966). NTA represents over 200 textile manufacturers and industry suppliers with operations in the U.S., Canada and Mexico. Members process fiber, spin yarn, knit and weave fabric, dye, print and otherwise finish fabrics in North America. NTA's mission is to provide effective representation in Washington for American fabric forming companies and to promote the use of American-made fabrics for apparel, home furnishing, industrial, and other markets. NTA is the largest (by member company count) textile organization in the United States.

General Approach to Standards:

§ NTA is an active member of ISAC 15 (the Industry Sector Advisory Committee on Textiles and Apparel) and, among other things, provides advice and information on industry concerns in the area of foreign standards and technical regulations.

§ In response to USTR's request for information on non-tariff barriers, as part of the Doha Development Agenda, NTA commented on a number of technical standards, technical regulations and certification procedures identified by its membership

Specific Issues of Concern:

§ There are major concerns that chemical testing requirements could be developed that would be too complicated, too costly, would cause delays, and could be used to set up non-tariff trade barriers.

§ India's requirements for ensuring that textile and apparel products do not contain certain banned dyes are excessive, burdensome and unnecessary.

§ REACH, the proposed EU legislation on chemical testing, could potentially develop into a very cumbersome non-tariff trade barrier, affecting all textile products from intermediates to finished products, regardless of the volume of chemicals used.

§ There is a concern that there will be EU-wide acceptance of a German Consumer Goods Ordinance, which bans the sale of textiles containing certain azo dyes. (Note: The Commission recently implemented an EU-wide ban on azo dyes in textile products. However, Germany has requested the authority to maintain a higher level of restriction on these products.)

Desired Government Assistance:

§ The USG should promote self-certification with back-up information from chemical suppliers, which is working now in the United States, as a better course of business.

§ Need to monitor EU REACH legislation.

The Cordage Institute (CI)
Gale Foster, Technical Director

Since 1820, the Cordage Institute has represented the cordage and fiber rope manufacturing companies in the United States. Presently the Institute represents about 70 percent (in pounds) of products produced in the U.S., and also has as members the international producers of fibers, machinery, specialty products and services. The Cordage Institute also has 10 international ropemaker members.

General Approach to Standards:

§ CI has developed standards covering a wide range of natural and man-made fibers, including high performance fibers, in a variety of constructions.

§ CI commercial standards will replace Department of Defense specifications, at no cost to the government.

§ CI is a member of the U.S. TAG for ISO TC38/WG22-Ropes, Cordage and Netting.

Specific Issues of Concern:

§ Annex 4 of the WTO/TBT Triennial Review now provides language that says: "signatories do not create unnecessary obstacles in international trade through the use of technical regulations and standards. This includes that standards need only to be developed in accordance with certain principals to be creditable and suitable for use within the meaning of the Agreement." These principals lay to rest the assumption that creditable standards had to be developed in a certain body, or in a body with particular membership requirements - read ISO!

§ One Country, One Vote makes the ISO process strongly in favor of the EU and encourages block voting. There needs to be some arrangement to level the playing field - perhaps by counting the EU as one country.

§ Complete transparency should be the benchmark for international standards.

§ International standards and regulations are mostly developed through procedures that are government controlled. In the U.S. there are public/private organizations that develop standards and regulations and there is a strong movement to have government standards eliminated in favor of commercial standards. Even government standards require outside input and are published in the Federal Register.

§ Documents like CE and ISO 9000 have a pervasive effect on international trade. They are developed without outside input and make it virtually impossible to do business in the EU unless companies actually meet their requirements. ISO 9000 is a process that requires mandatory procedures for product approval but really does not insure quality assurance. ISO 9000 is expensive to qualify and there is no possibility for an "Or Equal" option.

Desired Government Assistance:

§ Annex 4 has emerged from a WTO/TBT Agreement that has established that other standards development organizations can also consider themselves qualified to produce international standards. This should be vigorously promoted around the globe.

§ U.S. Standards organizations that develop international standards should be identified and supported.

§ Conformity Agreements are logical but rare and they should be encouraged in some way.

§ The DOC should also strongly promote what it has committed itself to - a Call to Action to Strengthen U.S. Competitiveness.

Association of the Nonwoven Fabrics Industry (INDA)
Peter Mayberry, Director, Government Relations

INDA, headquartered in Cary, NC, is the trade association representing the nonwoven fabrics industry since 1968. INDA's mission is to promote the growth and profitability of the nonwovens/engineered fabrics industry. Nonwoven fabrics are a multibillion-dollar business in

the United States, and among INDA's more than 200 members are such well-known companies as DuPont, Kimberly-Clark, BASF, and Johnson and Johnson. INDA's International Trade Advisory Board is comprised of the users, suppliers, and manufacturers of the nonwovens industry. INDA works in close collaboration with EDANA (the European Disposables and Nonwovens Association) and several Asian nonwoven associations.

General Approach to Standards:

§ INDA is the primary organization that develops nonwoven fabric standards.

§ INDA's Standard Test Methods Committee (STM) has taken proactive steps to reduce some of the burden imposed by the existence of multiple sets of standards.

§ INDA is a member of the U.S. TAG for ISO TC38/WG 9 Nonwovens.

§ INDA members work with trade associations representing the nonwoven fabrics industry in Europe, Japan and Brazil to facilitate the harmonization of nonwovens standards on a worldwide basis.

Specific Issues of Concern:

§ Due to the financial burdens and complexity of the regulation of the EU REACH initiative, INDA believes that the policy, if enacted, represents a potentially significant technical barrier to trade.

§ Over the years, INDA's members have been frustrated by the lack of harmonization between the standards for nonwoven roll goods and finished goods made from nonwovens prescribed by the U.S. standards setting body, ASTM, and standards-setting bodies throughout the rest of the world.

§ INDA notes concerns about the long-term ramifications of the emergence of ISO as the premier body for setting global standards, and the declining role - for the nonwoven fabrics - that ASTM seems to be filling.

Desired Government Assistance:

§ INDA has discussed concerns over the REACH initiative with U.S. trade officials, and has strongly urged that action be taken in the World Trade Organization or other appropriate body if the REACH is actually put into place.

American Apparel and Footwear Association (AAFA)
Steve Lamar, Executive Vice President

AAFA was formed in August 2000 through the merger of the American Apparel Manufacturers Association and the Footwear Industries of America. Drawing from a broad, strong membership base, AAFA is the national trade association representing apparel, footwear, and other sewn products companies, which compete in the global marketplace. AAFA's mission is to promote and enhance its members' competitiveness, productivity, and profitability in the global market by minimizing regulatory, legal, commercial, political, and trade restraints. AAFA seeks to achieve this mission by: representing the points of view and pursuing the concerns of AAFA members before the public and all branches of government to advance the association's legislative, international trade, and regulatory objectives; ensuring that individuals employed in the sewn products industries are afforded opportunities, and are treated with fairness and respect; communicating information to promote the apparel, footwear, and other sewn products industries worldwide; and creating a favorable environment for the advancement and exchange of best practices and technological innovations.

General Approach to Standards:

§ AAFA is a member of the U.S. TAG for ISO TC38 Textiles.

§ AAFA is an active member of the ISAC 15 (Industry Sector Advisory Committee on Textiles and Apparel) and, among other things, provides advice and information on industry concerns in the area of foreign standards and technical regulations.

§ In response to USTR's request for information on non-tariff barriers, as part of the Doha Development Agenda, AAFA commented on a number of technical standards and certification procedures identified by its membership.

AAFA did not provide a presentation, but did contribute to the discussion.

American Yarn Spinners Association (AYSA) Mike Hubbard, Executive Vice President

AYSA is the national trade association of the sales yarn industry in the United States. Its membership includes more than 100 corporations who operate over 300 yarn spinning, texturing, mercerizing and dyeing plants. AYSA's members produce spun yarn on the ring spinning, woolen and worsted, open-end, air jet and modified worsted systems from virtually all natural and man-made fibers. The membership also produces thrown and textured filament yarns.

AYSA did not provide a presentation.

Industrial Fabrics Association International (IFAI) Stephen Warner, Executive Vice President

IFAI is a not-for-profit trade association whose more than 2,000 member companies represent the international specialty fabrics marketplace. IFIA is the primary organization that develops

industrial fabric standards (i.e., tents, awnings, banners, sleeping bags, etc.). Member companies range in size from one-person shops to multinational corporations; members' products span the entire spectrum of the specialty fabrics industry, from fiber and fabric suppliers to manufacturers of end products, equipment and hardware.

IFAI did not provide a presentation.

Discussion/Comments

The discussion at the end of the presentations focused on 4 main topics: the EU REACH legislation, EU block voting in the ISO, capacity building in the FTAs, and U.S. flammability standards for textile products.

EU REACH

Mr. Lamar, AAFA asked if the U.S. was considering WTO actions with regard to REACH. He posed that this might be a good time to pursue this actively, particularly since the EU was so active in pursuing retaliatory measures with regard to the U.S. Foreign Sales Corporation issues and other disputes. Ms. Stradtman, ITA, Trade Compliance Office responded that the U.S. is carefully monitoring the issue to ensure that the EU has followed the process set out by the WTO Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement. The USG has put in place all the right markers for any future action that might be taken. However, at this point the EU Commission has not passed the REACH legislation. Mr. Ford, US&FCS, Office on International Operations reported that the Brussels' office has been working on this issue for the past 3 years and building a coalition with other countries. Mr. Lamar encouraged the USG to continue to work vigorously on this issue.

EU Block Voting in the ISO

Mr. Lamar asked if the upcoming EU enlargement presents an opportunity for the U.S. to weigh in on our concerns about the EU block voting in the ISO. This could be handled as a type of compensation for the potential disruption in trade caused by 10 additional member countries joining the EU. Mr. Ford responded that EU enlargement is expected to be a positive thing for U.S. exporters. Ms. Ngo, ITA, Office of European Union and Regional Affairs responded the "one country, one vote" issue will be hard to overturn as each country pays dues and the ISO would lose money if it treated the EU as one country.

Increasing Participation of Non-European Countries in the ISO

It was suggested that getting the ISO meetings out of Europe might encourage participation by other member countries. Mr. Daniels, AATCC reported that even when the meetings have been in the U.S., there was still low participation by Canada, Mexico and Latin American countries. Ms. Ngo reported that the Europeans have provided standards to other countries for free, which encourages the use of European standards.

Capacity Building in the FTAs

Mr. Lamar suggested that capacity building with regard to standards development be included in the U.S. FTA negotiations. Ms. Schweiker, ANSI reported that they have outreach programs, but the level of activity varies by industry; it's like global politics. Mr. Ford reported that the Foreign Commercial Service can help with diplomacy through ITA standards attaches overseas: they can solicit information for U.S. industry, provide information to foreign industry and encourage participation in standards development.

U.S. Flammability Standards for Textile Products

Ms. Adair, ATMI, raised the issue of a potential problem with textile bedding flammability standards being developed by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and standards that were developed by the California Bureau of Home Furnishings and Thermal Insulation (CBHFTI) . The CPSC is expected to begin rulemaking in early 2004 to develop a federal flammability standard for textile bedding products. If the industry were to be presented with different standards from the CBHFTI and CPSC a few years apart, a lot of resources will be wasted and the impact on industry and consumers will be expensive, confusing, disruptive to the business, and probably counterproductive. Furthermore, some mills, particularly those operating in countries that do not have stringent and enforceable environmental and workplace health and safety laws, may choose to meet the California standard by treating cover fabrics with flame retardant (FR) chemicals. There are concerns in the U.S. and Europe over the toxicity to both the consumer and the environment of some FR chemicals used on textiles, particularly brominated compounds, some of which are banned or under review in Europe.